POETRY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

For many years it has been the policy of this magazine to print poems from the U.S.A. and the Dominions and Colonies without making any mention of the provenance of the poet. His poem is printed alongside the work of his British confrere without any distinguishing mark, tab or footnote. Looking through past issues it would, we feel, be difficult to say whether the author of any particular poem came from Nashville, Tennessee, Wellington N.Z., Aberdeenshire or the Tottenham Court Road. Surely an important moral can be drawn from this, (a) that regionalism is bunk, (b) that the new generation of writers have a common inspiration, most noticeable in the U.S.A. where the poets of the past decade seem at last to have made an impact and discovered a sympathetic audience. The converse, will no doubt, be stoutly argued. But our own view is that time has a greater effect on a poet's verse than space.

In this issue we print a further example from a Festival of Britain prize winning poem 'The Witnesses' by Clive Sansom. All the prize winning poems will be issued in volume form by Penguin Books later in the year. It will be interesting to see what independent reviewers who have no obligations to any government body will have to say about the choice of such a distinguished panel of judges as the Arts Council of Great Britain (sic) were able to assemble.

EDITH WEAVER

A Man out of Season

Come, clown, put on your winter aspect.
The mummery of summertime
fades with the applause of leaves
politely tapping their old wizened hands.

The hero doffs his harlequin
to flee this frosty auditorium;
within a new mask of severity
he makes his exit as the northern wind.

Trembling, green turns in upon its origin
with all the damasks of illusion down
the stage reveals a structure
austere as forests where a fire has been.

Fancied actor, you are old,
the moon is your last angel
holding a steady lamp to light you home:
there is no further audience for motley.

Consider, consider your coffin walls—
will you then jest
when the hyperborean jailer
thrusts his blue face against the glass?

Though heaven hush you with its royal snow
dare you still mock
as when the bones of earth were tongued
with red and yellow rhetoric?

Youth in a greater wisdom acts
but for his peacock company.
Alone in a dark play
the fool weeps that Orion will not laugh.

L. D. LERNER

Remembering the Sea

The sway of slumber and the swell in the veins
Still float one sometimes out of the land-locked brain,
Swing us sleeping under the troublesome tides.
Stray thoughts twisting in the dark flood
Whisper, wander round the washed bones,
Under the slow eroding flow of the blood.

How we trudged up those days of dust,
Lay on the hot short ledge of the night,
Hearing the heaving, drinking the din of the sea.

How the sea beat on the sick brain all day
In a fever-mist of sound. How I lay
In a drenched dazzle, while the sea's red roar would
loom.
A lit haze in the heaving brain
Swam in the swimming room.

The sea is shoving the earth away,
The slow sea shovelling
Loads of light in the caught crest,
In the shout of a wave.
The sea is pushing my mind saide,
The hot sea stamping over the stretch of my mind.

II

In the channels of the brain
Waters whisper of madness;
Amid the blue and lucid shells
Words like seaweeds winding
Stray on the sands, or stain
The still amorphous stone;
In the plumbed pools, round the rock's edge,
The sound of a full tide flowing
Grows under growing
Coral of caught thoughts,
Flows to the open unsuggesting
Unplumbed sea.

LOUIS JOHNSON

Circe

Beautiful, yes: but what do you make of them
that tell you so? who let that vision penetrate
too deeply the imagining heart?
The hymn
chills on their lips. They are sealed in concrete.

Or run, screaming their swine-serious terror
by dark-fringed pools where it's too late to doubt.
Do we all bear so bodily our each error
or sniff our small sins' desires with such snout?

Circe and all round whom our contrapuntal
words weave fine fingerings of love: look
back in our altars your mirrors—and mantle
no other lover with your flesh, but break

the cunning spells night weaves, and the glass,
hung from its chain. And see the forest filled
with feet running away, and the last
of them turn to curse, and your beauty cower, old.

CLIVE SANSOM

The Madman of Gergesa

Fellow self within my self,
Follows and torments myself—
Hear, behind this wordy night,
Wind-grunts and the snorts of night,
Voices stumbling up the cliff,
Repeating, beating on the cliff,
Matching echo in my brain,
The endless echo of my brain.
When we left Tiberias,
Finger-eyed Tiberias,

You we two sought safety here,
Thought we could find safety here
In this rockhill caved with tombs—
Only dumb men house in tombs.
Lied, you lied! See, stumbling near us,
(Cliff-torn child-rocks crumbling near us)
Man there in the lamp of moon,
Dead man risen in the moon.
What have I to do with you
Jesus, what to do with you?
Keep your words! Torment me not!
Son of God, torment me not!
Name—he questions for our name.
Tell him nothing. Name no name
Lest his powers untenant us:
Mangod will untenant us.
Listen! sh! he talks to me—
No-one between him and me.
Try to hear and not to hear:
Self-in-self may overhear.
Words, the voice that stunned the storm,
Still might still this other storm.
Once he knows that I am many,
If he only knows how many
Ghosts of self inhabit self,
He will banish self from self,
Drown it deeper than the lake,
Deeper down the deepest lake.
Voice—that voice is my religion—
Lord! Christ! Friend!—my name is legion!

From the Festival of Britain prize-poem, 'The Witnesses', by courtesy of Penguin Books Ltd.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Words with God

When I was a child—then I knew you best,
Asking for the sun or a toy,
Or safety in the dark, my mind
Fashioned you from the breath of my request,
As those who found their early joy
On mountains and on hills might find
The same hills by your presence wholly blest.

So I set up house for you, and had planned
Your life to interrupt despair
With benevolence, and to twist
The tail of death and meet its stare with bland
Indifference, to father fear
As though it grew only as grist
For faith, a corn that proved the growing land.

In me I set up house for you, like those
Who built temples upon hills
Then gave you ordinance in all.
Now only the stones remain like old clothes
Discarded, the worn, ragged frills
Of faith, strange, when the shadows fall
Like years on the heart a deadening close.

When pain streaks through the limbs an angry flare
Like lightning flashing its whipcords
Through the body of the sky, whines
Still the lingered hope that you may be there,
Unwhipped from the temple by words
And sciences, symbols and signs,
To cleave all heaven with a burst of prayer.

Now we've grown old of you, old man a time
A dying, with nothing to leave
But fear creating gods, our fear
To make from nothing a play of faith, rhyme
Of reason; but can we believe
In being alone, nothing there?
Play hero in our lonely pantomime?

RICHARD KELL

First Person

There is no way of measuring desire.
Who can say that here was a falling drop
and here a brawny wave shouldering rocks?
No search of history or legend will determine
that this renowned passion
was justified by greatness, and this
beneath contempt for being a moment's lust.
Each was its own intensity, new and separate,
as every heart, like the latest touch
of the inventive wind on moving cloud,
was secret and unique beyond all reckoning.

'Had I been you' means nothing. Still time is chucked
away
on owlish advice, moral comparisons,
exchange of confidences.
(Though waste of time, as such gladly accepted,
was never waste of life). And these will serve
no more for rival selves in one person
than for different people. This heart and mind
must always baffle me their intimate acquaintance.
So I wonder, being newly gifted
with my own spring season—when brash sunlight
startles my gaze and wind elbows the leaves—
how winter was authentic or dreamy autumn
anything but a rare dissimulation.

And so I wonder, gladly wasting time.
The past knows nothing of desire;
only that there were lovers, saints, poets
and strange inhabitants of my own life
who once desired. Not years of calculation
can tell why one poor fool became a sinner
and one contrived a raw-boned purity.
Only the moment which is always now,
and mine exclusively, is privileged
to know what meaning lies in nightfall and
the memory of a girl I saw today.

SEYMOUR GRESSER

Roots of the Wanderer

VI. *Sun in the Window*

The light does not pass through your fingers,
fluid of the screen-catching net
and light trapped where the blind half-way down
break the back of daylight at the stone;
the light does not go by unseen
when you have waited for your eyes
as a mountain for descent hangs its shadow
over the ocean, again be purple rock
suckled in tides,
the light is bride
because you have been widow.
Because you have been fog
to hearts of peoples, unable to speak or smile
your face reminds them of the ghosts
and face-down clocks, and calendars chalked
with the death of flies.

Face that spreads like wire in a myth of bubbles,
unborn in a child's discarded pipe,
I am come to remember you
and churn in a wooden bowl the fog with time
that made us blind in the belly madness,
in the fire that answered all infinities
and broke the open palms of asking anymore
why through the wax-sealed eyes I see
host of your face and flax-brown growing,
force of your life beating hard this dead body,
I come back love, broken and beginning,
your voices, your lyric sermons,
and wines from the melted roots of your vinyard body.

CARROLL COATES

The Forest, The River, The Sea

I would dream a while longer
Thinking on these symbols that define a continent
Loneliness given over and the millions lost
Desiring what I desire but cannot name:
The forest, the river, the sea

I have grown old between the horns of desire
And the exploded shell of disaster
I burn with words bright as candles for death-watch

I lie in the bosky shade, in this shrouded room
The sun like a blade on the floor
The smell of ginger rises from these sheets
Waters run between the ginger trees
Gold with life and red with recurring time

The tree of my father has fallen
Dead leaves down the stream
Symbolic of death, as everything must cease

Must cease!
Even I, as my passions so quickly aroused
Droop in this shade with the sleep of defiant boredom
The sound I hear is the flood
The ocean returns like reason, like lumpen-wrong

I shall bind my hair with a towel
Lifted from the best hotel
And walk with my catholic sons where the land ends
Where mystery decks the shore with mysterious shells

No longer to lie in bed with a naked Indian
And tomorrow a voyage to God knows where
New and wise beyond my days and inexplicable
O strange, desiring what I name but cannot tell:
The river, the forest, the sea.

PATRICK GALVIN

Famine Gold

The city hall clock struck two in the day
And Midas ran out in the city streets
And all that he touched with his hand of gold
Turned to hunger and cold despair.

What can I touch to please me most,
A child or a woman, a fox or a man?
Touch hunger, said I, in her hollow mouth
And burn your fingers with the frost of madness

She's out in the attics and out in the lanes
And the earth she walks on rants and shouts,
Heart without soul and bone without marrow
Curses the soil and tears it asunder.

But Midas refused and went skimping away
Dragging behind him, his heavy gold leg
And the old dead effigies of my hunger
Spit sharp stone grit over all the land.

The leaves fell down and the tree fell down
Sick on the ground upsetting the wind
And everything coughed and everything scattered,
The leaves were gone with a cry and a green tail.

Still Midas cried, gold to the sea and the rocks
And the mountains of want grew high as Parass:
Parass was the heaven of Lannigan's hunger
When the waves of the sea made oysters make pearls.

And women shone bright as the eyes of the sun,
Children saw glory hang limp from a tree
Humanity's eyes were picked out with a pin
And Adam lay raped of his skin and his harvest.

Then men went out hunting with hounds off the leash
Searching the houses and streets made of gold
But all they found in the glitter-come-glitter
Was sea turned clay turned sand turned brass.

IRIS BIRTWISTLE

Gestures of Death

The retiring seasons
Mother continuous change
As outward footsteps
Infuse the returning tread.
Journey follows journey
And the rhythm remains intact.

The homing pigeon
Makes light of mountains—
No candle needed where eye
And foot follow a left-over moon
Pale in noonday as the face
Framed in a furtive window.
Wings rest in a coil of wind
That set the blunt road singing,
Reef sharp claws thread coral
Pennants through the bluebell air.

Sorrow and Joy
Serve the same banner—
Tears lay a bean trail
Proof against shrill arrows
Rising like inverted rain
From a festering wilderness,
No grisly beak can banish
These stepping stones,
Nor netted seas deliver up
Dissolute monsters.

Even the somnolent dog
Lying between tottering
Doorposts does not smudge
The lettered welcome—
It underlines brief roses
Who admit no boundary
But lean their resilient heads
Like whitened hands
across forbidding walls
In patient gestures of death.

DAVID DEREK STACTON

Stele

Be stoic as the bird
who has not heard of thinking,
whose screaming goes unheard,
and whose eyes are unblinking.

Descend upon the flock
and feed upon the sparrow.
And be content to mock
the hoer and his harrow.

Live with the frigid snows
that crack across the mountains,
where nothing lovely grows,
and ice will be your fountains.

Retreat and live alone.
Look down upon the meadow.
Your body is your own.
Your lover is your shadow.

WILLIAM MERWIN

Herons

As I was dreaming between hills
That stones wake in a changing land,
There in the country of morning
I slept, and the hour and shadow slept.

I became the quiet stone
By a river where the winds
Favour honest thoughts. Three herons
Rose into a hemlock tree.

And I heard, "All day I stand
Dreaming that the night has come;
Beneath my wings, beneath my feet
The resignation and the death."

And, "When will darkness bury me
Who stand all day with open eye,
The small eye through which the years pass
From one place to another place."

And, "I have neither eye nor dream;
Dumb as with sleep or dignity
I stand, and others speak of me
In questions, but no prophecy."

But I knew neither dream nor eye
And held my question till a wind
Shook them in their hemlock tree
And I became the man who fell

After the lightning long ago
At his own window; there he stood
And leaned out on the afternoon
Till someone touched him, and he fell.

Daylong I dreamed as one who sets
His impudence in a falling house
And laughs and sleeps. The ruined hour
Moves and outmodes this comedy.

Who will see me if I fall?
I waked between the quiet hills;
I saw the dark and came away
And night where I had lain all day.

OSWELL BLAKESTON

On Not Being Nautillus

He is a Nautillus
Zig zag his course
Who's rigged to ride
down four seas' side
or rest in sloth at the Amazon's mouth
Zig zag his mast:
While I? No matter how I nip
or where my pool is drab
My fate to watch the land flow past
(that scuttled ship)
For who may cast a shell of name?
I am a hermit crab.

BRENDA CHAMBERLAIN

Seal Cave

Far down, in the pool below me,
At the foot of yellow rock walls
A monster barks.
It is the bull seal, the bull seal,
Blowing, threshing and flowing
Nine feet of smooth solid flesh
Green like oil. Look, he comes
Out of the secret cavern,
The mammalian bedroom,
The communal resting place,
Into open water, a boiling emerald sea:
And is aware through the invincible
Rise and fall of the waves,
Of how I admire his performance.
Though he turns an aquiline profile
And hoods his eyes with heavy lids,
He is nonetheless aware.

From the pulsating
Jewel-coloured sea, from white foam-lace,
Rises a gentle stone-grey head, whiskered, soft-eyed.
Dappled, white breasted, vulnerable,
Gleaming like a fish, it is a cow of his harem.
Hola, hola, hola, seal cow.
She dives down the entrance channel, into the pool,
Her mottled back, where it touches the surface,
Becoming irridescent as mother of pearl
Rainbow, mother of pearl,
Sheen of the sleek and mottled skin.
Those brown beseeching eyes would have me go to her
Would draw me down.
Those almost human hands extended,
Then folded inwards to the breast,
Say come, come, come,
To caverns where whalebones lie like tree stumps,
Bleached, growth-ringed whalebone trunks.
Mother seal, seal cow,
Your eyes almost compel me to a salt death.
Your eyes are so full of knowledge,
It would be no surprise
For me to find you had understanding
Of how it is, I am a lonely woman
Living on a lonely strand:
Of how it is, that when in the Spring I am crowned,
It is but with seatangle and shells.

Evening has come. It is cold on this sunless rock
Past which waves hurry in tumult.
The moon rises in the wind-burnished sky
Over the sea pouring relentlessly past.
The sea is cold: the moon is cold,
O virginal Spring moon.

JAMES KIRKUP

Heroic Torso by Meštrović

Arms, head, hands, throat, striding limbs
dream bound in rock darkness, where the rest
was lost and found. Poised haunches, heavy loins
buttress bold thighs that wade high in curl-clipping stone,
erect, plunge deep into the formal plinth.
Rib-ghosted flanks. Wing-fluent shoulders. Proud spine
flexes a muscular, profound, tense, liquid line.

Hewn from breathless rock, the male trunk
now freely breathes again, and is itself
a living cage, imprisoning and setting free
great birds of breath, that fall, rise, and soar
high round the plundering eagle of the heart;
beat massive wings within this breast's dark heaven,
and die with their release, but dying, live again.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER

Left Bank, Paris

Is it not a superfluous accumulation of individuality
That bubbles and bursts on the flooded boulevards
Of this hectic hysterical terrible city
Amidst the hurry, hooting and screeching of cars?
Can it be Art they're after, these bearded boys,
These girls in dungarees at their café tables?
Can craft or vision feed upon such noise,
Their minds grow sensuous by exchanging labels?
A circus for the bourgeoisie that gives them bread,
They live in imagined exile near,
Too near their homes, self-disinherited,
And, dressed in banners, challenge their own fear.
Their ancient enemy loves them without passion,
Asks only to be amused while, still defiant, they,
Bombard him with his needs: a change of fashion,
Something to stare at, talk about and put away.

HOWARD GRIFFIN

The Ex G.I. at the Berlin Paintings
(*Metropolitan Museum*)

Before this *clair-obscur* he recalls fire
that ran involuntarily from hand
now charred to other hands decayed,
tied to a body half mechanical
strapt by steel swaddling in his chair;
the obscure pattern you must face,
his face . . . . . but all
fire now lies in this square
of light—de la Tour's *Sebastian*
a pillared world of gold and cinnabar,—
the gesture of the woman's waxen hand
countered by the candle's breathing flame.

Forget this loot torn from the salt;
mark the carving of his metal limb.
Who can never run
watches the pictured soldier lying there,
casque pierced and the feathered trim
shaft hill-sent, a man whose fault
was prayer, one in youth
too impassioned to be safe.
How beautifully the gleam of centuries
falls on the fallen flesh.
I challenge you to tear
old landscapes from these draughty galleries,
to place in the halls as archaisms—
spoilage of war, slashed treaties.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

From the Sad, Unlovely City

From the sad, unlovely city they ran away,
From the illusion of being without illusion
To the golden credulous childhood's harvest sky
Between the heads of the corn, where in profusion
Red flowers and blue flowers twined, and there they lay
In a rustle of sunlight talking drowsily,
Bright heads that hived all sweetness of the day;
And oh if I could command so easily
Some innocent spell to save their natural joy
I too would stay forever in that country.
But when I think how all the lovers die,
And see the cypress formal as a sentry,
Yet feel the brown earth, sensitive as an eye,
Kindle a restlessness through all the meadows,
Stillness is proved deceit where lovers lie
Dizzy with dandelions among the shadows.

O moving, merciless beauty, field and sky,
The changing children sleep, and I pass by.

KATHLEEN NOTT

The Edge of Summer

Now all the spring has crowded out into the garden—
if it is a garden, not a frame upon more ancient forest
of black firs still jetting from black granite, bolted in
an iron world and time, and always sad and weighty,
although sparse and fine, as if they stood remembering
the pressure of the forest and the scarce light of
their grim and grand poor youth: all that black world
commemorating by this mourning, as it was fed by falling leaves
but also stirred and tortured by obscurer deeds of living;
like mutes before men came not only over graves.

And the lilies of the valley at their foot
are derelict from times of swamp, are slips of dew and shadow
which are empty of their flowers. And other faces of the spring
crowding between these long dark lives' enduring winter
are yet pale, breathless and pale
as if their underworld were still upon them, as if white their
wreaths
were mourning also before birth, before the losses that will be,
fall of the plum, the black blood of the cherry,
their spring the panic of the new.
Yet there are new oaks also,
now barely broken from their rust, that are full of the sun,
that are yellow nets of the sunlight, and their tendrils
pull on the great and golden silence of the bell of blue,
swinging a vast weak note
from the merciless low country of the flies and bees,
of the ants in million single shadowed blades of grass
and of acres of blossom that whisper with obsessed blind faces.

Our scarlet tulips have bled already near to death,
their bliss of fire and pain is nearly over. The birds
birds of the ground, blackbird and thrush,
are bright eyes only in a feather-armour,
which restlessly count rewards.
One imagines a lizard—
to move in a stone age. And if men came
they would be curious, humble and gentle, and their hats and
trousers
formal and quaint, and mourning also,
for the fewness of the hundreds of their years .

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

Gateway

Nothing is certain, only that the heart
Will beat, warm bird in the hand, for time's brief spell,
Then quietly, ebbing out like flames that sink
Into their coals, is still.

No one can follow then through the narrow gate
Dark and shadow encumbered, strangest passage.
There is no answer; a door slammed in our face,
And no word, and no message.

Only when stillness on stillness falls, as rain
Drops into pools and swells them till they brim
Small coins spreading to shoals of silver spilt,
Comes the firm, certain

Knowledge that there, beyond the door, the gate,
All that we tried in vain to hold, that led
Us, beckoning like sunlight slipping over the hills
Always a county ahead,

Will wait, and over the threshold we shall feel
As when from a shadowy barn at summer's height
We stepped into the sun, whose bright meridian
Was shadow to this light.

MAY SARTON

Lullaby

If you deny
Love, ah then
Lie down, lie
With a ghost
And be well lost
To living men.

Pillow your head
On the bare floor
On the clean wood.
Stifle your tears
And years and fears
And close the door.

Someone will cry,
"Despair, despair",
And your dry eye
Shiver for love
Though nothing move
And no one there.

Ghosts never die
Nor can be hurt
So lie down, lie
Alone, asleep
But you'll not keep
Love out, lost heart.

Someone will knock
In the late dark
To sigh or mock,
A ghost be there
Upon the stair
Before the lark.

EDWARD A. JAMESON

Memory

(*Continuing a thought of Marcel Proust*)

It does not remain within us always
But like one evading the hebetude
Of a lonely lodging house
Leaves and wanders past the gentians
On dusty window sills—
Or suddenly
Returning across the threshold
Of the shadow'd hall,—
The half-remembered place
Of dingy-potted plants,—
To dwell again in retrospect
With remote thoughts,
Like a child recalling
The daylight gone,
Incredulous, while counting the hours
Since darkness intervened,
What was, or might have been,
Lies veiled by eyes naive
In the dark meadows
Of a past reality.

E. FEIN

The Ants

They plotted the course with sand
And each
Like his microcosmic ancestor
Set grain to grain

They spat broken teeth into the mortar of their work
And chattered to each other with empty gums,
How great was their design. Through the careful tunnels
Their voices tumbled like numbers through a matrix

They seeded the earth with oil
And each
Like his guarded neighbour
Ate from silent fingers

They held council with their graves (the dead were willing)
They applauded the darkness. Through the frozen tunnels
Their echoes like bullets sped linearly
In the elbows of the dark the new-born screamed

EDWIN BROCK

Victim

Do not despise the patience of pavements
The silence of bridges, the watching
Of drains. Do not despise
The brown, wrinkled casements that
Hang on your windows making no claims
But the task of an endless vigil.

Do not walk where the tree trunks
Are blackened with age, nor where old
Sagging timbers descend. Do not
Linger where wishes are potent
With rage and the sea is a terrible blend
Of faith and a simple cruelty.

But do not
Too easily choose the sand for there
In each small grain a world of whispers
Could command more terrors than time
Has contained.
You are alone
You are seeking for one place to stand
Where silence will wait on your words;
Do not turn to the streets or the sea or
The sand. Do not turn to the hatred of worlds
But look
To the mirror . . . . A white fungus curls
Around weeping, and waiting, and death.

NORMAN LEVINE

The Fishing Village

Two hands groundrocked that never will grasp
Separated always by the yellow apron
Or the blue fullness.

The harbour the palm made
There, boats, sheltered.
Between the fingers easily we swam.
And where the knuckles bulged
We picked our way at night
To find the paths familiar.
We lived from one hand.
We slept in the other.

Our lifeline, once fish, now creases for tourists.
The half moon light of the thumb is bright
Only for Carnivals and French Crabbers.
Occasionally the 'trip to the lighthouse' or
'To see the seals' rubs by these hands. But see
How recently and readily they bring with them
Their gifts of gloves in colours.
Made in Manchester. Sold in London.
Worn only in the hotness of every summer.

MURIEL SPARK

Four People in a Neglected Garden

Not yet. That is the high concession,
Taking the best of it.
Dying, not dead, the neglected garden
Is passionate yet.

But we are a process no protracted
Parley with trowel and gravel will prolong.
Nature nurtured us too, and then neglected
To gauge how long the grass grew long.

We four are gardens and are guardians
Of gardens. No wonder we let the increase
Of grass grow under our feet, and make our own
Seditious separate peace.

Because there is a truce before the tall tree bending
Falls in the end to wither,
Ourselves the occasion of an afternoon's portending—
Lie, syringa; follow, rambler; stems, tumble together.

HAZEL ROGERS

Sorrow and Winter Cloth

Sorrow and winter cloth
Are wound about with
Rough paper. If moth
Eggs are dust, whole regret
Has ever new associations
In which to chafe and fidget,
Holding its sadness close like

Small discs of stain spread
Within the saucer shadow,
Encroaching on another thread
Of starched lace—
As yesterday creeps over
Its back-cloth, bridging the space
Between the conscious days with dreams.

To close Jack's box,
And he without a spring?
Each day made orthodox.
There is no sunset for the worm!
With all emotions crushed
Beside the word deform
There stands perfection.

ROGER SHARROCK

Ode to a Muse in Autumn 1939-1949

aetas prima canat Veneres, extrema tumultus.
—Propertius

In this thirtieth year of my shame and our peace,
My heart is ten years' full but my eyes are dry scales,
Blown red and dry by particles of dust that roar
Out of the cold secular corridor; now cease
Heart's welling, eyes burning, the processional insult
Of years and fears, an age breaking, ten autumns' tumult:
Hold memory's clanging iron door,
And pause upon this southern shore
Where a lame tide makes the dull inland water crease

For she again, my unquiet lunar lady came,
To rap on a midnight window and speak of song;
While her yellow volcanic image lit the furrow
And cast the mass of the hill grey against the pane:
I met her first irresolute among cold stone
In the Jesuit's towery city, a lyric moan
Was all the fruit a lustrum long
That to our cold flirtation clung,
Stone king, ice queen with a planet tangled in her name.

Ruin of leaves and gold by elegiac stream,
And twelve pale skies hurrying like centuries by;
The barbarian king, the captains, the S.S. generals,
Under the Arc de Triomphe on the cinema screen,
History the interpretable dream of rage
And confusion in the heart: O how could she wage
War against time, against the fall
Of person and memorial
With the wistful enamel of her quicksilver dream.

So, faithful for a time, lady under the moon,
She was my follower in school and camp; in vain
The measured warfare of her light Paphian arms;
Till banking clouds grown dragonish in grey platoon

Obscured her crescent brightness, and for me she grew
A wanton of tents and squares. But then, though few
Small points of vision shone again
On that sublunary dull pain:
Raddled Cassandra, bloodily eclipsed at noon.

October's iron melancholy blade has scythed
Late roses from the summer lawns. The utmost dark
Of memory yields; through the tunnel we see ahead
At the end of the shaft of gloom in which we ride
A greyness turn to an increasing spot of white:
Surfacing in the present we blink at harsh light.
The same, but different now, our dead
Are pardoned because understood:
Stone Hamlet, branchy city, cool and moon-sprung bride.

Singer and place and muse are monumental now;
And if she were faithless, his was a clerk's treason,
Condemned wordily to thrive, between shelves and bars
An Alexandrian commentator. Allow
Remission to either for the corroding vice
Of the middle years between a war and a choice,
But O be grateful for this season
Of her descent against all reason,
For the new song the goddess prints on lip and brow.

O. V. de L. MILOSZ

Monkey Dance

To the strains of a trivial music, a music hopping, quizzical
And out of breath—while it rains, while incessantly it drizzles with decay,
Leap, leap, my soul, old monkey on the barrel organ, leap away,
Shrivelled, mangy, cunning old man, romantic, tender animal!

With your tail autumnally stripped, defoliate, twisted, curled pretentiously
In the shape of a question mark addressed to an empty, dusking sky,
Wipe away your tears, most gallant monkey, mournful, ridiculous,
Scrofulous monkey of dead love, toothless monkey of wasted days!

Another tune, another tune! You that smell of the smoking rooms,
The leprous alley-ways, the autumn fair and rancid frying-oil,
A laughing-stock for undernourished girls—O dirty, lean, appalling
Pitiable, epileptic monkey, pure nostalgic animal!

Another tune! The last, alas! and may it be that muted one, the mat
Waltz which never was, the dead thieves' requiem, music made of echoes,
Which says: good-bye to memories, to love and to the coconut . . .
While in the gullies' ancient, heavy mud the rain of wretchedness gurgles.

(*translated by Michael Hamburger*)

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

Always

Always
We shall go further without ever advancing
And from planet to planet

From nebulæ to nebulæ
The Don Juan of the thousand and three comets
Without even stirring from the earth
Seeks new strength
And takes ghosts seriously

And so many worlds forget existence
Who are the great forgetters

Who then will make us forget some part of the globe
Where is the Christopher Columbus who will make us
forget a continent

To lose
But to lose in truth
To leave space for discovery
To lose
Life and find Victory.

(*translated by Margaret Crosland*)

THE POETRY OF ROY CAMPBELL

DESPITE Roy Campbell's long absence from his native country and his own disclaimers, it can truly be said that he is a poet with South Africa in his blood. In his poetry the brooding elements, the violent climatic and geographical contrasts, the rich colour and the uncontrollable natural forces of the environment, as well as the conflicting qualities of its inhabitants, seek and find expression as in the work of no other poet. And despite his isolation and individual style—for he would have no truck with the prevailing fashions and ideologies of contemporary English poets, whether Georgians or Leftwingers, metaphysicals or pastoralists, surrealists or apocalyptics—without abandoning his roots or making any concession to the ideas he has opposed from the beginning, he has compelled the attention of discerning critics. Mr. G. S. Fraser, writing in *The New Statesman*, even suggests that his place "among the dozen or so more important poets of our time is assured."

Certainly he was unable to command the response he needed in his own country, and the frustration of his experience there added to the sting of his early satirical poems; but because he is a born satirist, he has never had much difficulty in finding targets for his barbed couplets. Most of the South Africans who resented his unbridled ridicule of "Banana-Land" in *The Wayzgoose* and the caustic lines of *Adamastor* have never appreciated the real motive behind these attacks. When Campbell made them he was still immature enough to believe that what provoked his anger was typical of South Africa alone. It was not long before he discovered that spiritual poverty was by no means so confined, before he was tilting at his true enemies—the materialism, the littleness, and the herdlike propensities of urbanized and industrialized humanity.

Unlike many of his English contemporaries, Campbell gazes outwards upon the world rather than inwards upon himself, and the pettiness and materialism he perceives appal him. He is preoccupied with the two contrasted modes of existence which, by means of an extensive range of symbols, he is never tired of presenting in his poems—the life of the independent personality revelling in freedom, and that of the conventional, herd-minded, unseeing, already half-dead citizen. When others speak of freedom, he sees only a progressive humiliation of mankind. The

typical figure on the one side is the horseman and herdsman; on the other is "Charlot", Charlie Chaplin shuffling in his thousands through city streets. And these have given rise to a whole series of figures with which the reader soon becomes familiar; equestrian—pedestrian; cattleman—shopkeeper; Sons of Cain—Sons of Abel; cowboys, toreros, vaqueros—Charlies, Tommies, Pommies, wowsers. The city itself is placed in opposition to "The Hill, the Pampa and the Tide" by which humanity may perhaps be regenerated. Another term for those whose equestrian qualities may cleanse and renew society is "The White Commando". Christ, though sometimes represented as a huge Albatross, is frequently a great equestrian figure, the Prince of Herdsmen, the Herdsman King, or the red Torero.

Campbell's first book, *The Flaming Terrapin,* brought him at one stride into the front rank of the younger poets of the time. The kinetic power and muscular rhythms of this long poem took the literary world of the 'twenties by storm. It scintillates with brilliant lines and is constantly lit with original and breathtaking images. Campbell admits a debt to the highly adorned and somewhat bombastic Zulu language, but how much is due to this we are not competent to say. It is clear, however, that Campbell has an unusual visual memory, as well as a rare sensibility, and his mind has been stored with such colour and line and movement that Africa bursts through, as it were, in climacteric flashes of genius. If *The Flaming Terrapin* vibrates with energy and the kind of high-pitched exuberance that usually lends itself to overwriting (and Campbell does not always escape the dangers surrounding this type of work), the style is remarkably individual and one which, though it has since been pruned and toned down, we have come to recognize as characteristic of Campbell's entire output. The machinery of the poem creaks at times, and the verse is occasionally marred by an over-dependence upon the old device of personification. The chief fault, however, is the poet's intoxication with words and ideas. Like one of his "riders of the air" of Part V, "lariat twirling, cracking whips", he gallops madly through without restraint or pause for reflection, driving image after image before him and scattering his verbs in all directions. That Roy Campbell has a more vigorous mind than most of his contemporaries can be demonstrated by his verbal prodigality. A reading of *The Flaming Terrapin* leaves no doubt concerning his capacity for activizing the language; passage after passage, taken at random, shows the

same vitality and enthusiasm. Yet because the exuberance is seldom abated throughout the whole poem, the total impact is weakened. The reader is carried breathlessly along on the crest of a tidal wave that neither breaks nor loses impetus until it reaches the final exclamation-mark.

The first years away from South Africa after his attempt to launch the literary magazine, *Voorslag* ("whiplash"), with William Plomer, were very fertile in lyric poetry. *Adamastor,* the volume containing some of his finest poems such as *Rounding the Cape, The Serf, The Zulu Girl, Tristan da Cunha, Horses on the Camargue, Autumn,* and *The Sisters,* was published in 1930. *Poems* followed later in that year, a limited edition of pieces most of which were reprinted in *Flowering Reeds,* together with a few lines of satire that afterwards grew into *The Georgiad.*

In *Adamastor* he reveals himself as a thorough-going romantic, and first of all he romanticizes himself, the poet. Influenced by Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, he employs symbols which relate largely to the poet and the poet's relationship to the society in which he lives. He translates Baudelaire's *L'Albatros*; he dwells upon the suffering and glory of the poet in the tale of *Mazeppa.* The young rebellious steer driven from the herd, the solitary cobra of the Kalahari, the palm tree of the desert, and the parallel drawn with the lonely island fronting the Atlantic surges in the magnificent *Tristan da Cunha*—

> *We shall not meet again; over the wave*
> *Our ways divide, and yours is straight and endless,*
> *But mine is short and crooked to the grave:*
> *Yet what of these dark crowds amid whose flow*
> *I battle like a rock, aloof and friendless,*
> *Are not their generations vague and endless*
> *The waves, the strides, the feet on which I go?*

—all emphasize the cycle of rejection, lonely suffering, heroism, and ultimate glory and power of the outcast from society.

The Georgiad, another venture into satire, appeared in 1931, and was obviously intended for those who have more than a casual acquaintance with the feuds and conditions of the English literary scene of the 'twenties rather than for the general reading public, for it is crammed with allusions to private incidents, poems and characteristics of various writers and editors of the time. Yet the general direction of Campbell's thrusts is unmis-

takeable, and the reader is compelled, at least, to re-examine his standards of value. As its title suggests, *The Georgiad* is modelled upon Pope's *Dunciad* and is aimed at the Georgian poets and their followers. It was the bloodlessness and affectation which provoked Campbell to flay the Georgians so mercilessly; and in some of his comments he completely overstepped the Georgian idea of good literary taste. All the Georgian traits were remorselessly exposed to ridicule—their "week-end cottage" attitude to country life, the public display of their love of dogs, Shanks' poeticized enthusiasm for "good old English beer", Humbert Wolfe's "humility", Squire's *Lily of Malud* and *To a Bulldog*, the Bloomsbury accent, the habits of reviewers, humanitarianism and post-war disillusionment. *The Georgiad* will certainly not bear comparison with the polished satire of Pope; nevertheless, it is extremely amusing and, for that reason, will continue to provide entertainment for some time to come.

From *The Flaming Terrapin* and *Adamastor*, through the poems of the thirties, to *Mithraic Emblems* (1936), can be traced a clear line of development. There is little of the former egotism or arrogance in *Flowering Reeds*. The love songs in this collection are imbued with a deep passionate quality that is communicated through a more subdued tone and a more selective range of imagery than the earlier exuberance permitted, and the discipline of *Choosing a Mast* and *La Clemence* is such as was prefigured in *Mass at Dawn* and *Horses on the Camargue*.

Campbell is easily roused to anger, but does not lose the capacity to look beyond the immediate scene that moves him. This idealistic outlook is not escapism. It was born of a South African boyhood free of the deadly pressure of crowds and cities. The man in Campbell demands freedom, while the artist insists upon order and beauty. The priest, the soldier, and the poet are the "eternal triumvirs of Earth" (*Posada*).

He was living in Toledo as a horsebreaker when the Spanish Civil War broke out, and his Catholic and pastoral sympathies and his respect for tradition induced him to fight on the side of General Franco against the Republicans. Here he found new threads of experience to be woven into the pattern of his thought, some sombre, others vivid and colourful. *Mithraic Emblems* contains ten poems dealing with various aspects of his wartime experience, from the fantasy of *The Mocking Bird* to the crusading urgency of *Hot Rifles*:

Of all that fearful fusillade
I reckoned not the gain or loss
To see (her every forfeit paid)
And grander, though her riches fade,
Toledo, hammered on the Cross,
And in her Master's wounds arrayed.

Campbell's support of General Franco, when most of his contemporaries favoured the Republican cause, has frequently been cited as evidence that his sympathies lay in the direction of totalitarianism, but this is to misunderstand the poet and misinterpret his motives. He had made no secret of his violent hostility towards Communism. For him the war in Spain represented an open conflict between the Christian tradition and Communist materialism (the Christ or Crucifix image appears again and again in the war poems of *Mithraic Emblems*). Being both a man of action and a practical idealist, he was compelled by his very nature to take sides in that conflict, and there could be no doubt in his mind as to which was the enemy "when all the world was Red with hate!"

The second World War found him fighting again, this time for Democracy, "though by his age, race, domicile, description, /Exempted from all service or conscription", and in his next volume, *Talking Bronco* (1946), he had a great deal to say in his satirical style about the Left-Wing poets who were not in the fighting forces. For this purpose he invented a mythological character, MacSpaunday (the name obviously derived from those of four well-known poets), and this figure appears in several of the poems. The most impressive pieces in *Talking Bronco,* however, are not the mordant satires, but the translation from St. John of the Cross (one of the Spanish poets by whom Campbell has been influenced), the philosophical *The Skull in the Desert,* and the sonnets *San Juan de la Cruz* and *Luis de Camoes.*

It may seem odd that so active a man and so vigorous a poet as Roy Campbell should be drawn to the mystic and saint, St. John of the Cross, but it is in keeping with the conflicting elements which go to shape his outlook. Perhaps this profound reverence is the obverse side of his character and is obscured, to some extent, by his natural zest and vitality. There is certainly an affinity between the two poets, or Campbell could never have communicated the essential qualities of the Spanish poet's work so perfectly as he has. In his translations of *The Poems of St.*

John of the Cross (1951), Campbell displays another aspect of his remarkable talent—and succeeds in suppressing his violent and aggressive personal moods without impeding the spontaneous flow of imagery normally at his command. It is an aspect which leads us to believe that—if he can avoid having his career cut short in the bull-ring*—there may yet be a new and important development in his work when he has been able fully to integrate the incongruous elements in his make-up. As a general rule, it can be maintainted that translations either fail to preserve the original freshness of the poet or subordinate the poet's ideas to those of the translator. Campbell has entered upon his difficult task in a spirit of sympathy and understanding so that the intensity of the mystic's experience is both fittingly and faithfully conveyed.

The discerning student of Campbell's life and work will observe yet another curious feature. Despite all his gibes at people in the mass and at the herd instincts of the crowd, Campbell can truly say—"Let me be there to share the strain/And with the poorest pull my weight." If he belongs to the aristocratic rather than the democratic tradition, as has been stated he certainly does not squeeze himself into the seats reserved for the privileged classes, but rides with the cattleman and fights with the ranker. It is this capacity for identifying himself with the individual members of the most primitive orders of society which has enabled him to catch the spirit of Africa itself, as he does in *The Zulu Girl*:

> *His sleepy mouth plugged by the heavy nipple,*
> *Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feeds:*
> *Through his frail nerves her own deep languors ripple*
> *Like a broad river sighing through its reeds.*
>
> *Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes*
> *An old unquenched unsmotherable heat—*
> *The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,*
> *The sullen dignity of defeat.*

and, at the same time, encouraged a tendency towards overstatement when the poet is expressing his contempt for life in towns and cities, a tendency which one critic has described (mis-

*The latest information, as we write, is that Campbell is returning to Spain to serve as a picador with Domingo Ortega, the world-famous bullfighter, after which he proposes to take up farming in Portuguese East Africa.

takenly, in our opinion) as "an element of brutality, of hatred uninspired by moral judgment, of pleasure in suffering." It seems to us that Campbell reacts so hotly against the artificial values of modern civilization and has been so forced to defend his political ideas that, with his naturally boisterous and aggressive manner of utterance, he has been inclined to exaggerate what he actually feels or believes.

It would be unwise to attempt a final assessment of his poetry at this stage of his career, for we are convinced that his best work has yet to come, when his varied experiences have been properly assimilated—always providing that his love of danger and excitement will allow him the opportunity to develop his medium to its full capacity. We are equally convinced that his poetry has, so far, been undervalued, political and personal feuds having served to obscure his real stature as a poet of the first rank. If we may venture upon an interim judgment, we hold the view, despite the fact that satire comprises a large proportion of his poetic output, that the lyrical poems will be the most enduring. For, however amusing he may be, Campbell is too undiscriminating a writer to distinguish between genuine satire and mere abuse; rich invective streams from him in a constant flow, but does not always reach a valid target. The characters lampooned are not always delineated sharply enough to stand out as living people. He has the Byronic flow, but not the Byronic relevance.

Roy Campbell's most valuable contributions to English poetry of today are undoubtedly his vitality and power. At a time when young poets had almost become afraid of exhibiting strong emotions or of speaking directly to their audiences without patronising them in "proletarian verse", when traditional forms were out of favour, Campbell pursued his own unpopular way, speaking without ambiguity, responding to natural beauty unashamedly if unsentimentally, yet attaining a technical mastery possessed by few of his contemporaries. Among the poems which will probably last beyond this age are *Tristan da Cunha, The Serf, The Zulu Girl, Choosing a Mast,* a few of the Toledo sonnets, *Luis de Camoes, The Skull in the Desert,* one or two lyrics from *Flowering Reeds,* and the translations from St. John of the Cross; and it is likely that extracts will be taken from his satirical poems to illustrate the peculiar conditions of his time. How many contemporary poets can match such an achievement?

G. M. MILLER & HOWARD SERGEANT

TWO POETS: AITKEN AND DOUGLAS

I first remember reading Conrad Aitken's poems, round about 1939, in back numbers of the magazine *Coterie* and in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*. One, I particularly recall was about Verlaine and Rimbaud— "Precious pair of poets"— playing chess and talking prosody (writer's shop) in some *auberge* while almond petals parachuted down into their bocks. Another, whose theme I have not forgotten was about the life of a pretty woman—a concatenation of sensations and impressions: how she looked out of the window on a summer morning, how she combed out her hair in front of a mirror, how her heels click-clacked along the bright pavements, and how (with the transition rather unspecified) she died in hospital under the anaesthetic. Need I mention I was hugely impressed. Being at that stage of 'mawkishness' which Keats speaks about in his Preface to *Endymion*, I was moved as much by Aitken's fleeting vision as by the plangency of his verse. It was like Delius' *Paris* in words—a kind of literary water-music.

At that time I was very concerned with certain of the poets of the "nineties": above all, with Dowson and Arthur Symons. I professed their own fin-de-siècle viewpoint; their cultivated melancholy. But whereas in them I found only the symptoms of the breakdown of the modern ethos; in Conrad Aitken I found the diagnosis: he was not one who knew not why he was so sad. Aitken's analysis of the trouble resolved itself into something which could be partly spoken of in terms of Hume's phenomenalism, Darwin's "descent of man" and "natural selection", and Bergson's picture of the universe as flux. The first gave rise to scepticism and encouraged a cult of pure sensation; the second debunked the divine illusion and did the dirt on the idea of love; whilst the third proclaimed the transience of existence and seemed to perversely celebrate—to quote the title of a piece by Edgell Rickwood—"the utter passing-away of everything."

This suited my mood at the time very well, but shortly after that history's trap-door opened, and out of it tumbled the bombs and V-2's. This, though expected, as they say 'was a new one', and when I was discharged in 1945 I began to wish that things would stay put, that values and virtues should seem to possess some sanction of permanence about them, and that mankind should not be so eager to recognise his kinship with Brother Ass.

About this time I came across Aitken's poem *The Soldier*, a

longish composition I was asked to review; and although I appreciated its musical nature and its noble spirit of charity and forgiveness, I now felt more clearly the poet's defects. *The Soldier*, if I remember rightly, was concerned with reconciling the fighting man's outlook with that of his enemy and opposite 'over there'. By a series of verbal flash-backs from the present to ancient Greek times, Aitken tries to point the parallel which all warfare creates and reproduces. What is different, he seems to suggest, is something one might easily forget. "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose". Now aesthetically speaking, one sees his temptation: but poetry is something more than aesthetics. To treat of time as an undifferentiated progression is to miss the nature of man in time. Every moment man is changing (by which I do not mean just wearing away like rock, mineral or inanimate nature—which indeed, is how Aitken sometimes treats him), but changing measurably for good or for bad, and his goodness or badness are the things that matter.

Skylight One doesn't change my opinion. In this book (containing fifteen poems) Aitken deals with themes of love and tradition in much the same nostalgic and despairing way. For example, in his *Voyage to Spring* the poet's argument is that love is nature's bait to procreation, which deed accomplished leaves vacancy and loss. Now to readers coming fresh to such texts as de Gourmont's *Physiology of Love* or Shaw's *Super-Man* some thirty years ago, Aitken's theme would have proved provocative and substantial: today we see it as a mere spent half-truth. Similarly when dealing with tradition (in his poems *Hallowe'en* and *Mayflower*), instead of demonstrating the continuity of past and present, he equates them; and in that equality their essence is lost. Time is a kind of eternal flux, one part of which is the same as another, as would seem to be Aitken's perspective of it.

Sensibility, as F. R. Leavis remarks, can always be observed in technique, which is good or bad as the latter happens to be healthy or unhealthy. Aitken's attitude I believe to be morbid, and this lax mental state is reflected in a certain jejune condition of his verse. Literary imitation is one indication of this and lines and phrases such as the following: "at three o'clock in the morning of life in death" (echoing Lorca's *Bullfighter*); "For the poor benefit of a lost momentary sensual satisfaction" (shades of *Hamlet*) answer no demand of literary counter-point (as we get in Eliot) nor attest to Aitken's strategy in juxtaposition. A second weakness reveals itself in a tendency to the tawd-

rily tragic. " 'There is ever' ", maintains a character in one of his poems, " 'a shadow of *moritura*/ in anything really beautiful—'

and our love lies bleeding,
even in the first kiss our love lies bleeding"

adds the poet in a stanza that gives a kind of blurred composite image of *The Yellow Book,* Compton Mackenzie's *Carnival* and *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. A third error in these poems is the over-employment of refrains, as if a grieving voice (rich in self-pity) was obsessed with its own sad syllabilisation. This refrain sometimes takes the form of one word reiterated in the course of a few lines, of a word repeated two or three times on end, or a phrase or group of phrases employed throughout the poem without very much internal variation.

Let me now, perhaps belatedly, remark that there was a lot in "Skylight One" I enjoyed: a poet of Conrad Aitken's experience is always worth reading for incidental virtues. My pleasure, however, was fragmentary, and in this review I have attempted to account for this aspect of my reactions.

Whereas my account of Conrad Aitken has inclined to be unashamedly subjective, Mr. John Waller, in his *Biographical Note* to the *Collected Poems of Keith Douglas* allows facts and events to speak for themselves. The most valuable part of this introduction is a description of the poet by his mother. "As a boy" she writes, "he was violent over things and people he disliked; bitter and sarcastic in his criticisms but, even when one-sided, often with a degree of truth not easy to refute." This statement about a man who wrote, "In its nature poetry is simple and sincere", tells us a lot and provides a useful kick-off.

Reading the book back to front, Chinese-fashion (except for the last six 'Unfinished Poems'), reading that is from his 'Juvenilia', through his 'Early Poems' and pieces written at Oxford, to his Army compositions and, finally, to the poems he wrote in the Middle East, we become increasingly aware of the focus he was able to give his private vision, this "degree of truth not easy to refute".

Oxford meant a great deal to Keith Douglas. Conscious of the nature of his limited reprieve he wrote how in the year 1940 he could not bear to lose

"even a part
of pleasure in the old-fashioned art of
idleness"

He was, though, not one of those for whom a temporary escape can ever become self-deception; those for whom Oxford, in 1941, was still

"not a city but an existence
outside which everything is but a pretence"

What was it, one may ask, that called him away from the contemplation of pleasant things, however adverse the environment or moment? For that he did take pleasure in such contemplation we can see from a piece written in 1937, an expert untroubled villanelle, about a Mediterranean town;

"Over and over the street is repeated with sunlight"

The answer, I suppose, is a powerful sense of reality and necessity —what things are, and what things must be (inconvenient and disagreeable though this knowledge may prove).

It was, evidently, this sense, this knowledge, which led him to renounce his 'lyric' style for his 'flat' style in his later poems, to look upon the semblance of lyrical afflatus as a species of literary "bullshitting", and to speak about the goal he bore in mind as a balanced combination of the lyrical and cynical approach. This fusion he seldom achieved. *Cairo Jag, Dead Men* and *Vergiss-meinnicht* are more than effective compositions. But how much song, how much truth, how much inspired veracity is there in them? One feels that Keith Douglas is being guarded even in his moods of horror and disgust, that he is set on keeping his voice level, and that "the careful absence of expectation" which he describes as his own attitude could prove at times an inhibiting formula even though the discipline it offered was salutary. Similarly, his poem *Bête Noire* (which he left unfinished and which he spoke about as being a protracted failure and success) affects us, again, as limited though brilliant: his technical dexterity and mental reservation could sometimes short-circuit a significant conception.

Again, one may take the poem *Aristocrats,* devoid of the deliberated limited response which one somehow senses in these other poems, but there a certain lack of formal integration meets one. Seldom does the reader 'get it both ways'.

There are, perhaps, two or three exceptions to this. *Time Eating* is a certain one, and *The Offensive* is another.

If the tenor of these remarks seems to reduce the poet's status, it is all the more important to add that they imply more than contemporary comparisons. His ironic pieces at their best are

the equal of Sassoon's, and if he lacked Owen's deep imaginative pity or Sidney Keyes' powers of visionary translation (evident in *The Wilderness*), he was, for the most part, the superior of most of the other last-war poets. It is only when one goes outside the circumstance in which he wrote his poems that one sees a number of their shortcomings; and that perhaps is hardly fair, but then, again, neither is time.

Douglas was killed at the age of twenty-four. Unlike such a poet as Robert Graves, who was once obsessed in a similar way with a variety of grim half-truths, but whose mind—being philosophical—arrived at conclusions partly by argument, Douglas came to them by experience alone. His brief existence delimited them, and distorted some of them in their showing. He was both too highly conscious and too honest a being to arrive at reality by a "leap in the dark". Every single step he took was verified, and history showed him only a gauche dance of death.

DEREK STANFORD

Skylight One, by CONRAD AITKEN (John Lehmann, 7s.6d.).
Collected Poems of Keith Douglas, edited by JOHN WALLER and G. S. FRASER (Editions Poetry London 12s. 6d.).

THE APPLE AND THE SPECTROSCOPE

The Apple and the Spectroscope by T. R. HENN (Methuen 12s. 6d.)

IT is always a joy to find someone taking Christopher Fry so seriously (in the respectable sense) as to see that he not only uses words but means them. The lines

> *But you, dear boy, with your twenty-five impartial years,*
> *Can perform the judgment of Paris,*
> *Can savour, consider, and award the apple*
> *With a cool hand. You will find an apple*
> *Over there by the spectroscope.*

from *Venus Observed* is one of the epigraphs to Mr. Henn's published lectures, and provides both a title for the book—the apple and the spectroscope stand here for poetry and science—and a key to its purpose. Christopher Fry, in this passage, inverts a banal situation: the older man, instead of trying to impress the younger with the superior wisdom of maturity and the hot impulsiveness of youth, is telling the young man that he is in a position to be impartial because he is not involved.

Mr. Henn in these lectures given to science students, is aware throughout that he is addressing young people who are not, so far, involved in poetry. He assumes an impartiality in his audience which few lecturers on poetry ever get the chance of doing; normally such an audience will be composed of students of literature, poets, or (a most heterogeneous, impassioned, and formidable group) poetry-lovers. It is clear from direct statements and by inference that Mr. Henn's audience have little experience of poetry. He becomes the advocate, and the audience, the judge.

The circumstances in which the lectures were given are both important and alarming. Alarming, because the lectures in the form they have taken are necessary at all; and important, because the lectures represent an effort to impede the absorption of the whole human personality into a specialised compartment. In a recent article called "What drove me crazy in Europe" Professor Miller of Harvard complained that the European 'faculty' system has become frozen, scholarship is "something tucked away in corners", books are sequestered "in disparate collections". Some of his criticism of European scholarship might perhaps be put down to Professor Miller's susceptibility to being driven crazy, but on this point he seems to have some justification.

A request for lectures of this kind originally came from science students themselves in 1946. Since then, the lectures delivered by Mr. Henn and his colleagues, weekly during the Cambridge Long Vacation, have received an overwhelming response. So it is clear that students as well as teachers are conscious of, and resent, being caught up in an ever-narrowing system of specialisation. The schools, Mr. Henn says, "are the victims (and will probably continue to be so) of the enormous pressure from the universities—themselves overwhelmed with applicants—whose scholarship standards have steadily grown more specialised and more narrow." Therefore Professor Bragg (who contributes a foreword) seems forced by hope rather than conviction to declare that from such lectures (one a week and in this case eleven in all) "the science student gets a sense of values and aesthetic appreciation of great achievements in fields other than his own, and his life in enriched by a deeper understanding of literature." The fact that the attempt has been made under such adverse conditions makes it the more laudable; the attempt to introduce an awareness of literature into intelligent minds,

highly trained in methodised study yet unprepared for 'Eng. Lit.' at university level—all in an extremely limited time—is something to perplex a university teacher. Mr. Henn has evolved a technique of exposition which takes all these factors into account.

(Since the editor of *Poetry Quarterly* has allowed me extra space I would like to digress here to speak of a legend I have heard about Mr. Henn—the sort of legend which only adheres to someone who has not gone out of his way to cultivate it. I have been told that in the years before the war a group of young poets at Cambridge who, I gather, were temperamentally left cold by the Scrutineering critics, found a source of encouragement and confidence in Mr. Henn. Students and their friends who wrote verse, were invited by him to informal discussions where new poems were handed round anonymously, and commented upon. Some of these potential poets may never have been heard of again, but others, known to readers of *Poetry Quarterly* are John Bayliss and Derek Stanford, and, I believe, Nicholas Moore.)

I think Mr. Henn's first concern is to establish confidence in the subject, in the minds of his audience. He is highly persuasive in the sense that he presents his subjects always with the primary interests of his audience in mind, and even at times, in scientific language. Anyone interested in what makes a poem should be excited by a description, in algebraic symbols, of the relationship between diction and meaning. Those who (like myself) cannot follow the process by which a proposition beginning "Suppose a poem to consist of a certain number of words, say 'N'. We may denote these words by W_1, $W_2 \ldots W_n \ldots$." is reduced to

$$\text{“}M_r^{(s)} = M_r (W_1, W_2, W_3 \ldots W_s).\text{”}$$

—those who are stumped by this, should be, as I am, tortured by their ignorance. It may be because I know so little of mathematics, and have forgotten what I once knew, but these signs seem loaded with compressed quantitative value, and I am fascinated by Mr. Henn's tables and diagrams which look likely to indicate endless potentialities for the analysing of a poem and what a poem does to the reader. I have never trusted the responses of those people who protest that they do not want poetry to be "explained away" by scientific methods (the criticism is usually aimed at the psychological interpretation of poetry)

because I feel that such readers appreciate poetry for reasons tainted with the hocus-pocus.

Mr. Henn employs this method merely as an introductory statement. His next concern is to demonstrate various aspects of poetry, from a carefully-selected group of poems, a passage from the Old, and one from the New Testament. Thus *The Twa Corbies* presents an impersonal attitude to death with "grim contemptuous precision", an antidote to sentimentality; Donne's *A Valediction* is re-created, as it were, by following the poet's thought verse by verse—"a circular poem, with a series of smaller satellite circles (to signify the separate images of each stanza)"; acceptable attitudes to love and death are found in Marvell's *Coy Mistress* through the progression of Idea, Reality, Resolution—thesis, antithesis and synthesis; the symbolism of Blake's *The Sick Rose* and the complex imagery of a passage from *The Waste Land* are examined as an approach to the complex meanings of poetry.

Clearly, Mr. Henn, in his choice of poems and in the aspects of them which he draws attention to, is out to create an awareness of poetry in a particular type of mind, to make poetry in general acceptable. It is obvious, too, that in his anxiety to persuade, he shirks or slurs over a basic factor in poetry which presumably he feels would be off-putting if formulated. "I am certain" he writes "that all great art is ultimately moral, as having a positive and constructive relationship to the sum of our attitudes towards life." Morality, he defines as "that body of collective moral values to which all men of our tradition and culture subscribe."

I am not going to enter into that much-tried question of whether a humanist ethic can endure without a religious basis. I feel, however, that Mr. Henn, where he draws attention to a moral here and a moral there throughout his lectures, does not give the impression of being guided by a "*body* of collective moral values"—rather, a disorganised collection of creeds not quite outworn. For example, in treating of Wordsworth's *A Slumber did my Spirit Seal,* he rightly remarks on the special characteristics of Lucy—she is a child of nature. And rightly, too, he emphasises the lines

> *Rolled around in earth's diurnal course*
> *With rocks, and stones, and trees*

in which he finds acceptance and humility: "She dies, and is

rolled round, in peace or in helpless passivity, as you will, with rocks and stones and trees." This attitude to death, which accepts "absorption into the body of the universe" is recommended, together with the realistic finality of *The Twa Corbies,* as worth the consideration of the audience.

Now it is arguable that Wordworth's lines are eminently satisfying simply because they perfectly express the death of one such as his Lucy who, in the poems, is not quite human—she was already part of nature while she lived. Had Lucy been depicted as a wholly human individual with human passions and aspirations, the fate Wordsworth gives her would have the effect of ironic tragedy, because a wholly human being is unique, never-to-be-repeated, and precious. It could be further argued that to extract a general philosophy of death from Wordsworth's lines is therefore both false, and when represented to students of science, pernicious. Still, we must accept the fact that Mr. Henn invites the consideration of Stoicism and Pantheism as attitudes to death.

In dealing with a passage from St. Matthew, however, the author incorporates into his body of morals a Christian heresy which amounts to this; Christ says "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on . . . . Take therefore no thought for the morrow . . . ." but this does not mean what it says; it means only a milder form of what it says. "It is simply" Mr. Henn explains, "a poetic statement of that truth that undue reliance on planning is against the currents of the world." Now this is also a literary heresy, for it is the critic's job to attend to the text, not to insert modifications. According to Mr. Henn, the injunction "Take no thought for the morrow" is a *poetic* way of saying "Take no *undue* thought for the morrow"; but presumably he would not define poetry as exaggeration, as he implies. Similarly the moral interpretation seems to me untenable. Either this doctrine must be accepted, and the human shortcomings which prevent its fulfilment admitted, or else it must be rejected; since any alteration of the doctrine is an invention of Mr. Henn's (and others before him) without a basis, as he claims, in Biblical poetry. Possibly he had a mind to the science students, for Mr. Henn neither rejects nor accepts, but invents, and consequently does them a disservice through muddling the issues.

I feel that deference to the supposed incredulity of this audi-

ence has often been carried too far; it is not worth getting converts to poetry at the price. Of course, when Mr. Henn describes the author of *Ecclesiastes* as one who "has not entirely accepted the divine revelation", this may well be his confirmed belief (even considering the text), but it also sounds like a diplomatic statement meaning "You see, he was just a sensitive agnostic like most of you!"

Mr. Henn is wonderfully clever at catching, and conveying, the suggestiveness of rhythms and words, and at showing how the components of a poem operate one on the other. He speaks with authority and is most persuasive on these matters. But he is a poor advocate for the moral value of poetry; even when he has something important to say such as "It is proper . . . to ask ourselves whether it may not be that the emotion of awe is a necessary condition of spiritual growth?", this tentative question is prefixed by the remark "One dare not dogmatize"; which unfortunately seems to have been true.

MURIEL SPARK